

Finding the right stuff

The Charity Commission's latest publication will help you find and keep the trustees you need, says **Sush Amar**.

Many trustees have an image of their ideal trustee board, one which will maximise the efficiency of their charity and achieve everything on their agenda. Yet turning this into a reality can seem like an impossible dream, with the result that many boards manage their expectations accordingly. They may assume the recruitment process will take too long, that they don't know the right people, or can't be confident that a good candidate won't later turn out to be unsuitable.

What charities need to know

The Charity Commission recently launched a practical guide to help charities achieve the ideal board for their needs. *Finding new trustees – what charities need to know* is a 'start to finish' guide that deals with the practical concerns most boards have when it comes to getting the right people, and making the most of them. Download from: www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc30.asp

The idea of a skills audit to identify gaps has been around the sector for a long time, yet our research shows that only 17% of boards have conducted such an audit. Only half of the very largest charities surveyed said they ran such an audit prior to recruiting new trustees.

Finding new trustees begins at the point when the board recognises they need new trustees. It provides a checklist for making a start, including advice on going back to the charity's governing document for guidelines, recruiting users, advertising for trustees and recruiting internally.

Diversifying your board

There's been much discussion recently about how diverse the sector really is and whether it walks the walk as well as talking the talk. *Finding new trustees* advises charities to step beyond established social and professional networks and find potential trustees that will increase the diversity of their board. But this isn't just political correctness.

Making assumptions about your users can be short-sighted, and a more diverse board can help challenge assumptions and offer new perspectives. The social environment in which charities operate is changing constantly and those directing the running of charities need to represent that. Diversity is more than just good practice – it's an essential component of meeting, and making the most of, this change.

Before actually appointing, the board needs to be clear about the legal restrictions on who can be a trustee, and any specific

requirements in their governing document. It's also sensible to consider any potential conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interests happen and it's best to address them, rather than ignore them or hope things will work out. Our experience is that these things have a tendency to come back and bite, so deal with them straight away, even if it means reconsidering the appointment. It will cause much less trouble in the long run.

For positions which involve access to, or contact with, children or vulnerable adults there is also the issue of Criminal Records Bureau checks. *Finding new trustees* offers detailed guidance on who is likely to need checks and how they are carried out, including clarification of the different levels of disclosure recommended. We'll be carrying out a consultation with the sector on the issue of CRB checks later in the year.

Getting it right from the start

Getting your new trustee is a milestone. Keeping them and getting the most out of them should follow. A proper induction is a vital part of the process of ensuring that trustees become effective members of the board as soon as possible.

All charities, regardless of their size, should consider both the needs of the charity and of their new trustees by providing a suitable induction programme. *Finding new trustees* offers some suggestions for providing an induction programme to meet these needs. Further suggestions for this are also available from our publication *Start as you mean to go on* which is available on our website at www.charitycommission.gov.uk under 'Publications'. None of them are difficult, most of them are common sense, but it's amazing how many charities don't offer them as a matter of course to new trustees.

A board that works

While there will always be areas that are outside a trustee board's control, in some areas they may have more control than they think. Creating a trustee board that works well is definitely one of them. We hope you use *Finding new trustees* as a practical source of reference to help with the process at each step of the way.